Alexander Schubert

HELLO

2014
written for Quasar Saxophone Quartet

last edited March 17, 2017 12:02 PM

Program Notes

Hello is an audio-visual piece in which the projection serves as a score to be interpreted by the ensemble. The video consists of gestures performed by the composer in his living room. The piece comes in eight movements and is an invitation into the personal world of Alexander Schubert. Please enjoy.

HELLO,

thank you for considering to play this piece. I am outlining a few ideas and concepts for the piece below: Please enjoy.

General Concept

The piece is audio-visual. It's basically a video that is accompanied by the instruments. The video consists of video recordings of the composer performing certain actions / gestures. These gestures are notated in the score as well and need to be interpreted by the musicians (as musical events - not as theatrical actions / physical movement - the idea is to find corresponding or contrasting music events for the given gestures).

The notation displays the rhythm of the gestures and also the lengths of the musical event. If a gesture reappears then the sound should be repeated more or less the same. A musical event linked to one gesture doesn't only have to be one note / sound but can also be a "musical gesture" - depending on how long the musical event is notated.
Split up the gestures between the musicians: Not every musicians should play for each gesture, but definitely more than one can play almost each time, sometimes all at once as well. Sometimes the gestures follow each other quickly, so it's good to alternate between the musicians (when you chose who picks which gesture). Use markers in the score to highlight which gestures you are playing.

There's a second system (called Music). This means there's no video gesture at this point but still music should be played. Also chose who's performing which of these notes. Chose the musical material based on the text in the score and on the musical context and electronics in the given passage.

In the "music notation" the length of the note corresponds to the length of the phrase. E.g. a full note means that the musical phrase is 4 quarters long - it can be both a note belt for 4 quarters or a very fast and random arrhythmic phrase with the total length of 4 quarters.

If a note doesn't have a gesture type below or above it, it means that the previous gesture / sound is repeated.

The piece is really based on the video and the electronics in the tape, meaning that in the rehearsal progress, rather use the video as an orientation and not the only the score. The score is a tool to make it easier to play along with the video, but eventually the video is the real score.

At a few points it says optional "film score". At this point the musicians can stay quiet or accompany the film with very, very subtle sound (almost silent).

Normally the sounds for the gestures stay the same during the piece.
They can be modified a bit to fit the context better (e.g. get louder at the end of the piece to fit the context).
The sound for the "Hello"-gesture (video displays "Hello", open hand icon in the score) can be modified in pitch, as at the end of the piece it accompanies chords in the electronics and the sounds should fit to these chords.

The musical gestures you chose for the gestures in the video should have a meaningful relation in some sort. In general I would say it should relate to the video but should not be mimicking all the time. For example the "eating cookies" part can be done with crackling paper and so on. It's obviously not about making the sound for the video. But it should be chosen with a certain motivation - i.e. it can illustrate or it can comically contrast the video gesture. Just make sure it's clear, precise on time and distinguishable from the other gestures (use different combinations of instruments for this too).
One last thing: The piece looks childishly easy - but in fact proved to be difficult and required intensive preparation and rehearsing with each ensemble that performed it - be sure to keep that in mind!

Instruments

The piece can more or less be played by any combination of instruments. It is advised to have at least four players, one of which is a piano/guitar/accordion or similar to play chords. Also a percussionist should be included. For combinations that do not fall into this description please contact the composer to check.

You are invited to use other small instruments or props other than those found in your ensemble. For example toy instruments, everyday household tools or found objects. Chose these instruments in order to fit a given video gesture you want to accompany.

Freedom

You may change the sound for a gesture during the piece if necessary. E.g. if the progression would be too fast otherwise or you want to add strength as the piece progresses. This also means the number of musicians performing a gesture can change.

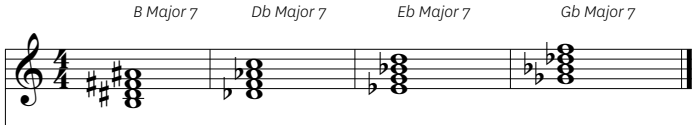
If you feel you have something to add in the piece (especially at the end when it gets more dense you are free too do so.

Special Gestures

The Glasses (🕶) and the "Text Hello" (✋) are the two most important gestures in the piece.

The Glasses (🕶) are supposed to have a "signal characteristic" - they're supposed to be clearly recognizable in the (fast) progression of events - but the sound should not be too alarming or piercing. Especially at the beginning of the piece the sound should not be too strong - it might be wise to have a gentle version of this sound for the beginning and change it (louder, more piercing) once the piece becomes louder and faster.

The Gesture "Text Hello" (✋) is extremely present at the end of the piece and coincides with a choir chord in the electronics. This chord comes in four different transpositions which are alternating. If you use tonal elements for this gesture - which might make sense - please transpose your content according to the transposition of the choir chord in the electronics.
There are four variations of the ✋ symbol with a number indicating the transposition. ✋1 is the base pitch, ✋2 transposed up two half steps, ✋3 up four half steps and ✋4 up seven half steps.



Staging & Performance

The players should be slightly illuminated. But the stage (and room) should be rather black. The focus is on the video! Use spot lights on the players (that do not shine on the canvas). The players may face the video canvas but should rather face each other and the audience.

The musical gestures of the performer do not need to be visual. They're just performed for the sound! No need for theatrical elements for the performers.

Style, Amplification and Mixing

The piece has a variable instrumentation and can be interpreted by ensembles in different ways. This leaves a lot of freedom and possibilities.

Within all this freedom a few points should be considered though:

- each icon/sound symbol should be powerful and strong (and be covered by several instruments)
- the overall sound of the piece is intense and energy-driven, it should not be a chamber music piece but a forward-going rock/electro piece
- the instruments should be well-amplified and form a good mix with the electronics
- the electronics (tape and processing) should be run by an audio technician as well as the amplification and this role should be treated as an instrumentalist

Different Versions of the Piece

The piece comes in different versions and the ensemble can chose which version of the piece to play. The video / material and the corresponding ableton live session files are all delivered with the performance materials.

Original

The piece was written in 2014 with an original video. There's a version of the same video in the project folder with a higher brightness for less powerful projectors.
The ableton session to open for this is:
"Hello-Performance Original.als"
The video file is:
"Hello Video Original.mov"
If you need the brighter version replace the file in the live session with:
"Hello Video Original Brighter Version.mov"

Remake

In 2014 I shot a new high quality version of the video (together with Evy Schubert). This is replacing the old version and should be used instead. It has a better quality and is brighter.
For this please use the ableton session:
"Hello-Performance Remake.als"
It uses the video:
"Hello Video Remake.mov "

Version "Hello 2.0"

In 2014 Evy Schubert shot a completely new version of the piece with a different story line. This is not an update but a new piece (although the music stays the same).
The ensemble is free to decide which version to perform (either the remake or the 2.0 version). The score is the same for both.
For this please use the ableton session:
"Hello-Performance Evy.als"
It uses the video:
"Hello Video 2.0 Evy.mov"

Realizing and Rehearsing the Piece.

How to best approach the piece?
There are three steps in preparing this piece:
1) Choosing the sounds for each icon
2) Rehearsing your resulting voice
3) Rehearse with the ensemble

1) Choosing the sounds for each icon:
The are two ways to do this: hierarchic (a) or individual (b)
a) A conductor, composer or leader of the ensemble or whoever feels interested in it prepares a score and decides for all the icons which instrument is paling what. This would be a form of orchestration.

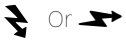
b) The alternative is that the group prepares their sounds together (more often the case).
In order for that to be effective the best way is, if each musicians goes through the score and prepares fitting sounds. In order to do that always also use the video file „Hello - Video mit Click.mp4“ which can be found in the rehearsal materials. This gives you the opportunity to find a sound that fits the video and the electronics.
In the next step you need to bring the individual voices together in the ensemble. There it makes sense to go through all the icons / the score and see who has prepared what. In many cases changes are necessary so that the sounds fit well together. Also pay attention that it is well spread and all icons consist of sufficient musical voices.

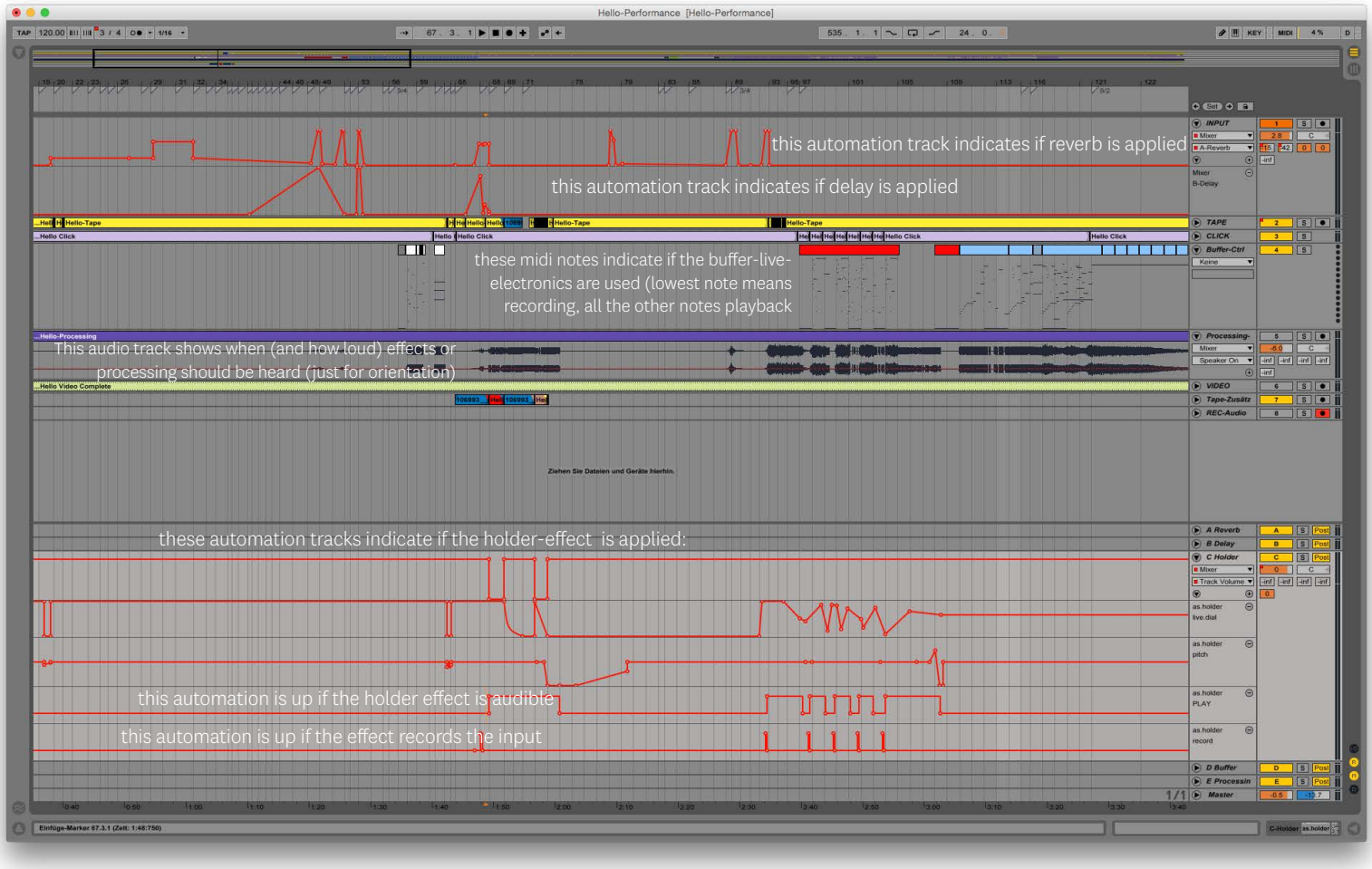
2) Rehearsing your resulting voice
In order to do this you can work with the above-mentioned video file „Hello - Video mit Click.mp4“ that has both the click and the tape sounds. There are also different version of the click track in different (slower speeds) in the folder.

3) Rehearse with the ensemble
Try to find a sound that is forward and intense, and make sure it is well-balanced between instruments and electronics. There should be no energy drops in the performance. If density or strength of sound drops rethink the orchestration of the section/icon at that point.

Overview of all Icons used in the piece

Icon	Description	Personal Notes
Chair		
*		
†	Glorious Sound	

Icon	Description	Personal Notes
FREE JAZZ		
Percussive		
Static		
	Harsh, Powerful, agressive	
	Percussive sound - short, fast attack - does NOT only have to be played by percussionst!	
	Glissando up	
faint		
Airy Sur-prised		
phrase		
	Error sounds (1 and 2)	
complex		
insisting		
Film score		
	Glissando down	



EFFECTS AND PROCESSING IN ABLETON LIVE

Concept:

The project uses 2 effects and two processings.
The effects are reverb and delay. And the processing is a buffer-effect and a holder-effect.

The effects are notated in the score with these icons: Ⓡ means the input is recorded, ▶ means recording is played back (altered) and you should here a processing sound until a ■ symbol is reached in the score.

There is also an audio track in the project called “Processing” - this audio file shows with the waveform when there should be live processing sound (as it’s a bounce of the live-processing). It can be used for orientation but should not be heard in the concert!

All 4 return channels with the individual processings / effects are then routed to the return channel E which sums up everything. This output has to be routed to the outputs 3 and 4 of you sound card and can then be mixed individually from the tape, which goes to output 1 and 2.

In the rehearsals make sure you test each of the effects once to see if everything is working!!

Individual Processings

1. Reverb

The input signal is send to the return track A with a reverb effect. The send amount is automated in the input track.

2. Delay

The input signal is send to the return track B with a delay effect. The send amount is automated in the input track.

3. Holder

The input signal is always send to the return track C with the holder-effect. If the effect is playing can be seen in the automation track “play”. If it is recording is visible in the automation track “record”.

4. Buffer

The input signal is always send to the return track D with the buffer-effect. If the effect is playing or recording is determined in the midi track called “buffer-control”. If the lowest midi note is playing the input is recorded. All other notes mean the buffer is played back (altered). If there’s no midi note no sound should be heard.

TECHNICAL EXPLENATION

Live-Electronic / Processing

The symbol ⓡ means the input is recorded, ▶ means the material is played back (with additional processing) and ■ means the playback stops.

General Technical Setup

The piece consists of the live instruments, a (fixed) video, a (fixed) tape and live processing.
The piece is performed with a click track. The click track starts with the first measure. The click is in sync with the video and the electronics.
The live-processing takes a mono input (sum of the instruments).

Equipment Needed:

- Video Projector and Canvas
- Headphone amp, headphones and headphone extension cords
- Mixing desk with pre-fader AUX send
- Microphones for all instruments
- Sereo PA
- dark room

Explanation of the Electronics

The electronics are done in Ableton Live with some additional parts in Max4Live. You will need a license for both these programs.

The project contains:
- a tape
- a video
- click
- live processing

Everything is synchronized in the project and basically to do the piece you will just need to press play and play the project.

Ableton Project:

1. Video

To display the video go to the menu, then “View”, then “Video Window”. Move the video window to the second screen (projector) and double click it to switch to “full screen”.
If the video is too dark for your screen / projector you can use a brighter version, which I can provide. You simply drag that video file in the correct track.

2. Tape

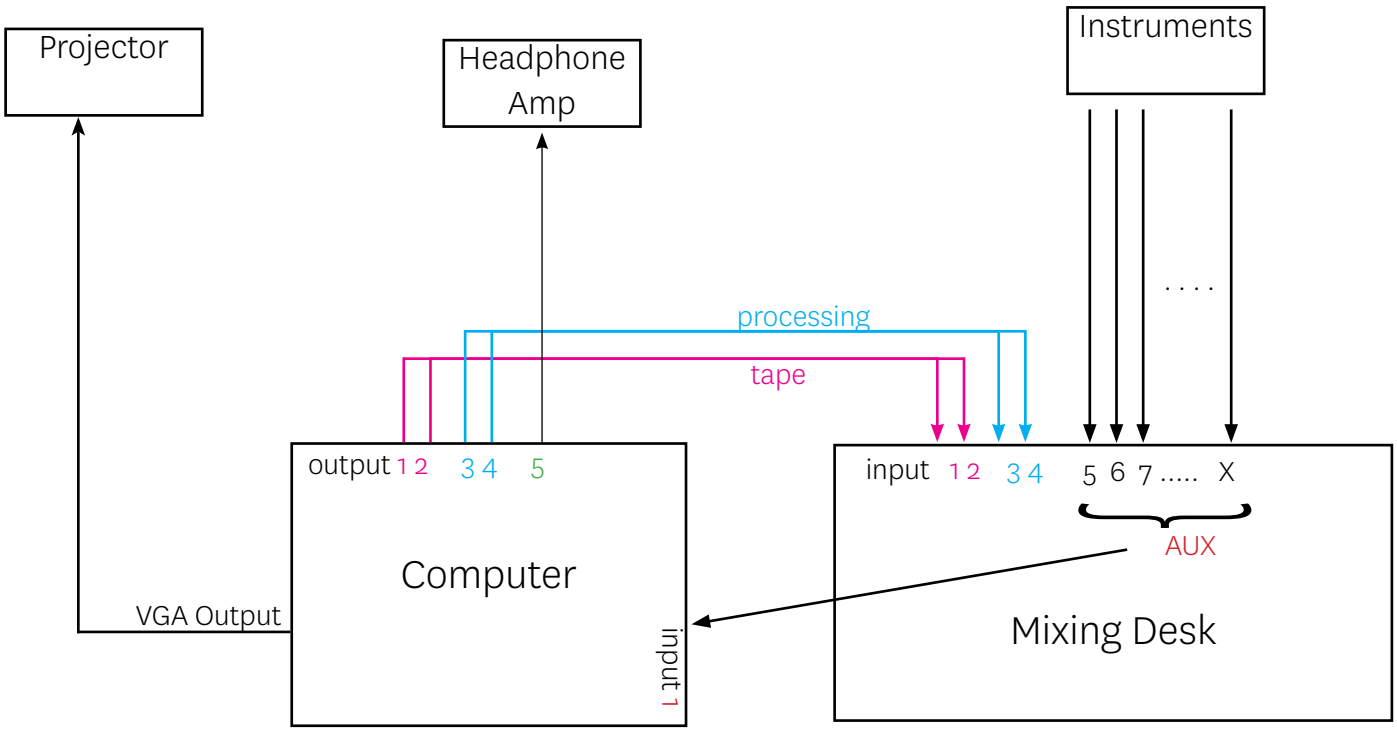
The tape will simply play in the project. The sound is send to output 1 and 2 of the soundcard.

3. Click

The click will simply play in the project. The sound is send to output 5 of the soundcard. If necessary enable the channels of your soundcard in the preference settings (preferences → Audio → Output Config).

4. Processing

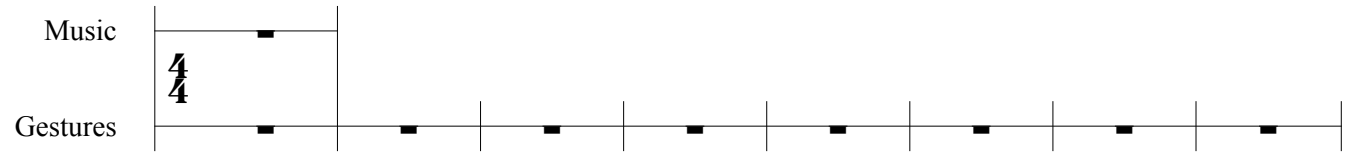
The processing is realized with Max4Live Patches Reverb, and Delays. It’s fully automated and will record at certain passages and plays back at other passages.
It takes the audio input 1 of the soundcard as input. Use a mixing desk (with a pre-fader AUX-Send) to send the instruments grouped to the first input. The different live processings are send to the Group (Send) E in Ableton Live. The sound is then send to output 3 and 4 of the soundcard. If necessary enable the channels of your soundcard in the preference settings (preferences → Audio → Output Config).

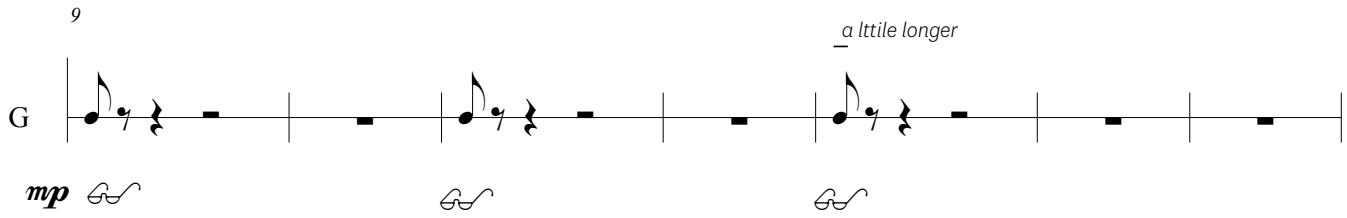


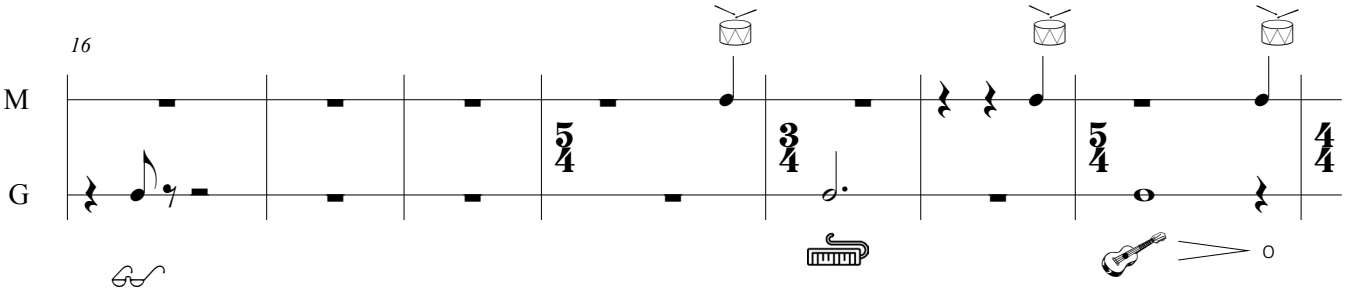
HELLO

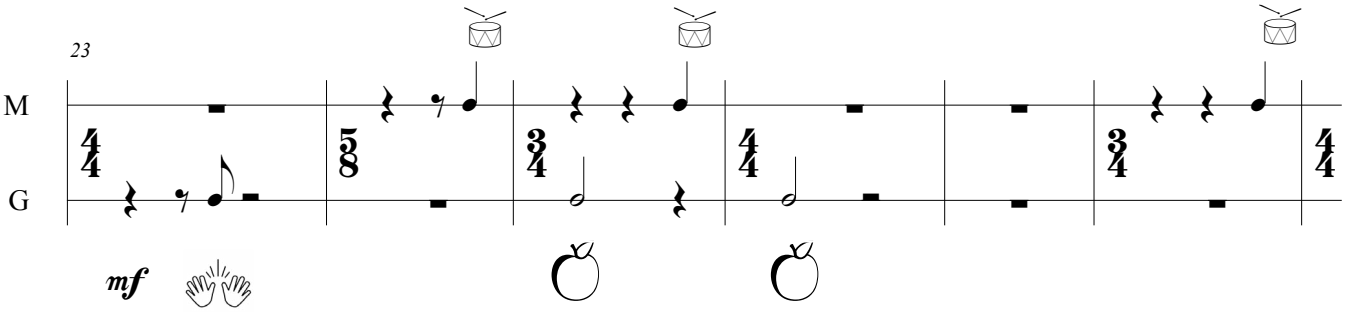
Alexander Schubert

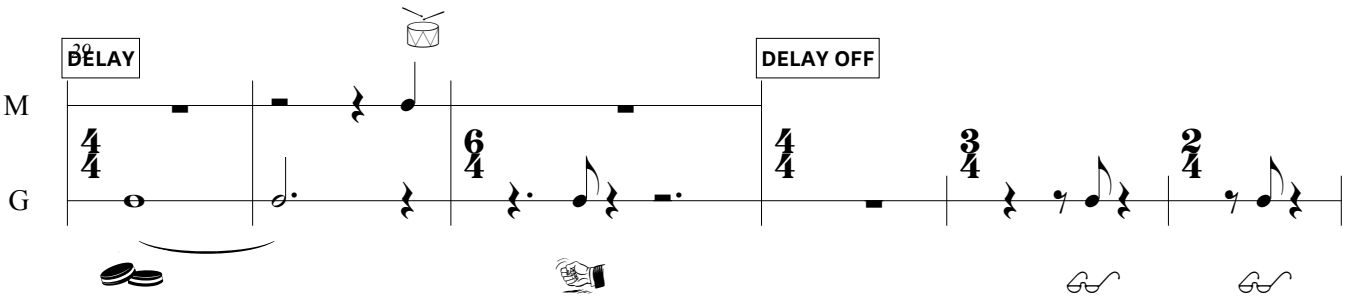
A (0:00)

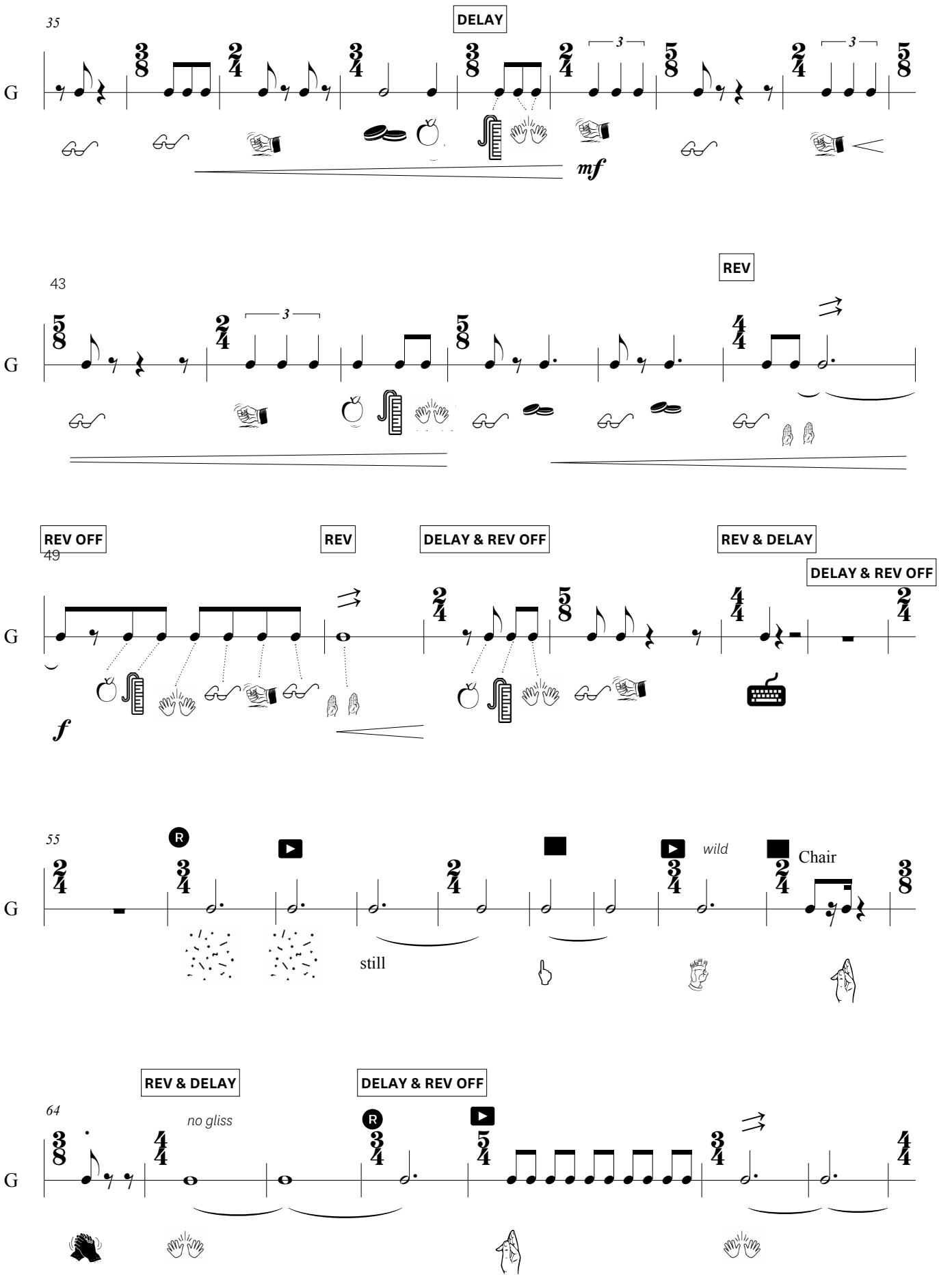


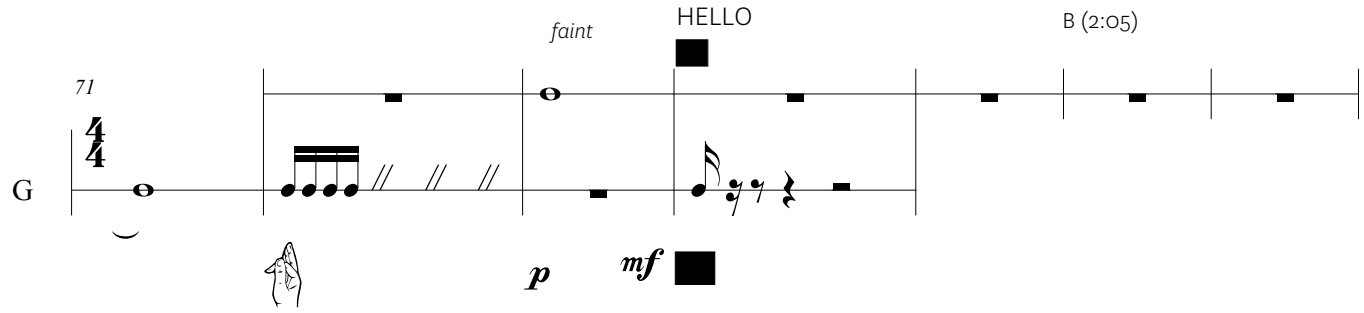


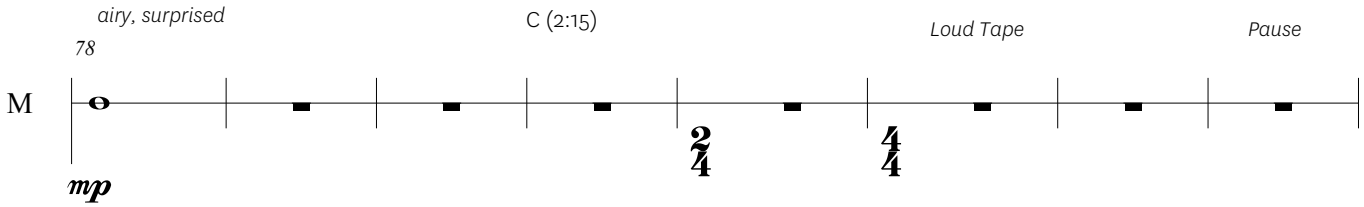


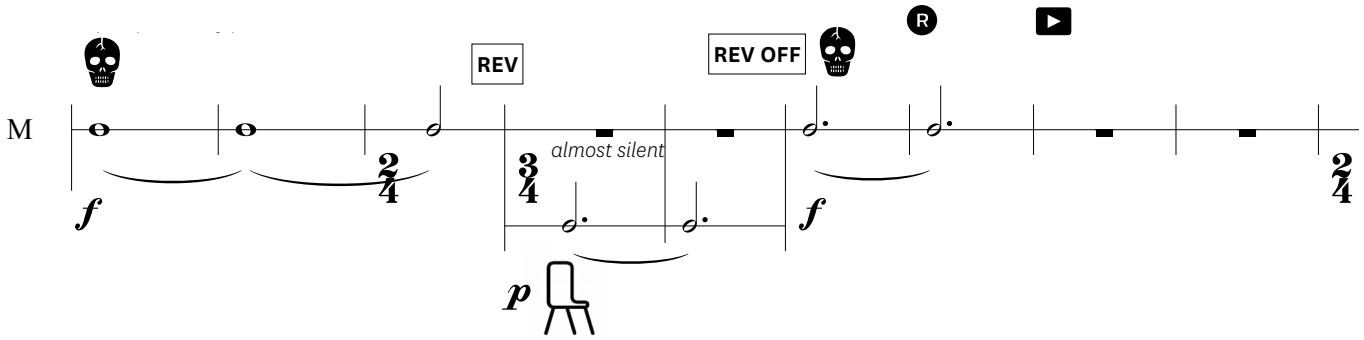


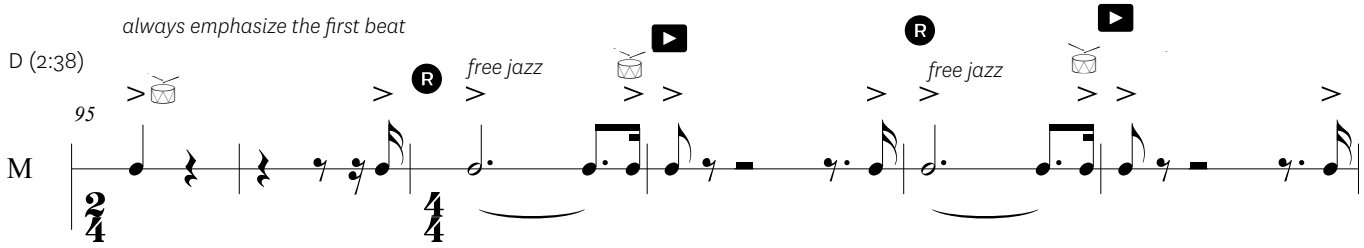


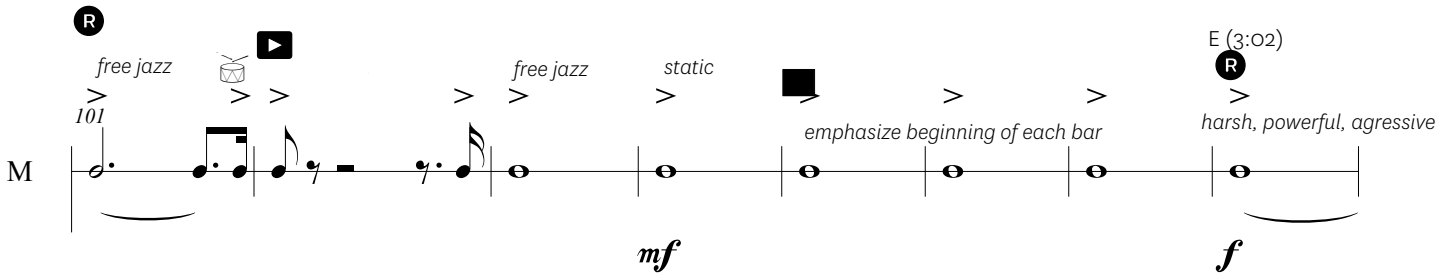

DELAY
35
G
mf
REV
43
G
REV OFF
REV
DELAY & REV OFF
REV & DELAY
DELAY & REV OFF
49
G
f
55
G
wild
Chair
still
REV & DELAY
DELAY & REV OFF
64
G
no gliss

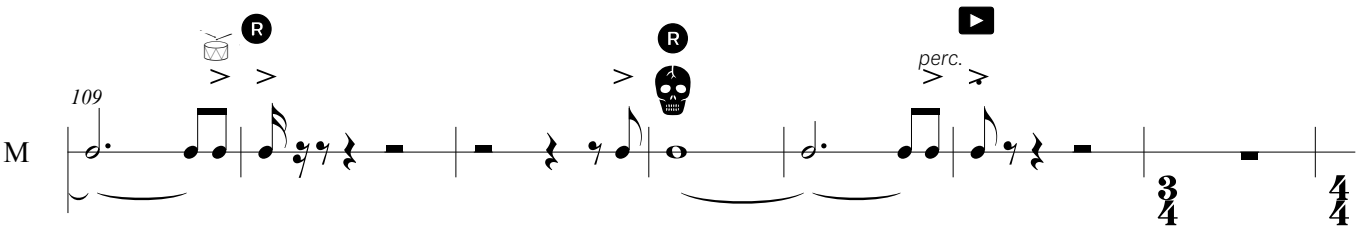

faint
HELLO
B (2:05)
71
G
p
mf

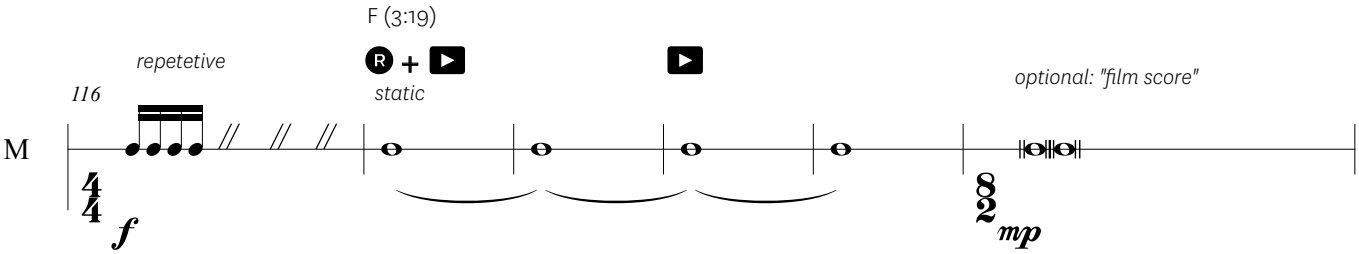

airy, surprised
C (2:15)
Loud Tape
Pause
78
M
mp


REV
REV OFF
M
almost silent
f
p
f

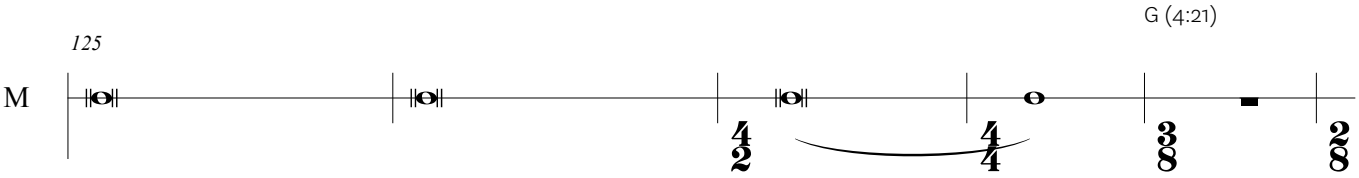

always emphasize the first beat
D (2:38)
free jazz
free jazz
95
M

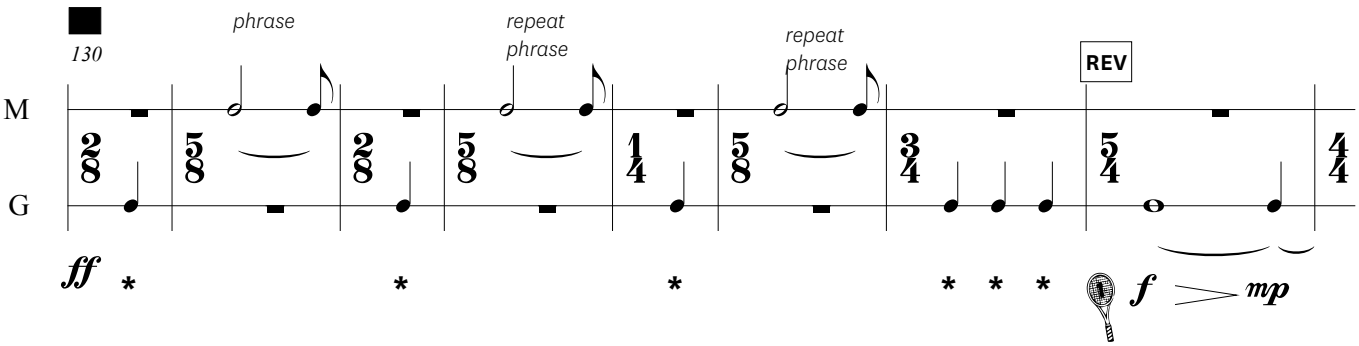

free jazz
free jazz
static
E (3:02)
harsh, powerful, agressive
101
emphasize beginning of each bar
M
mf
f

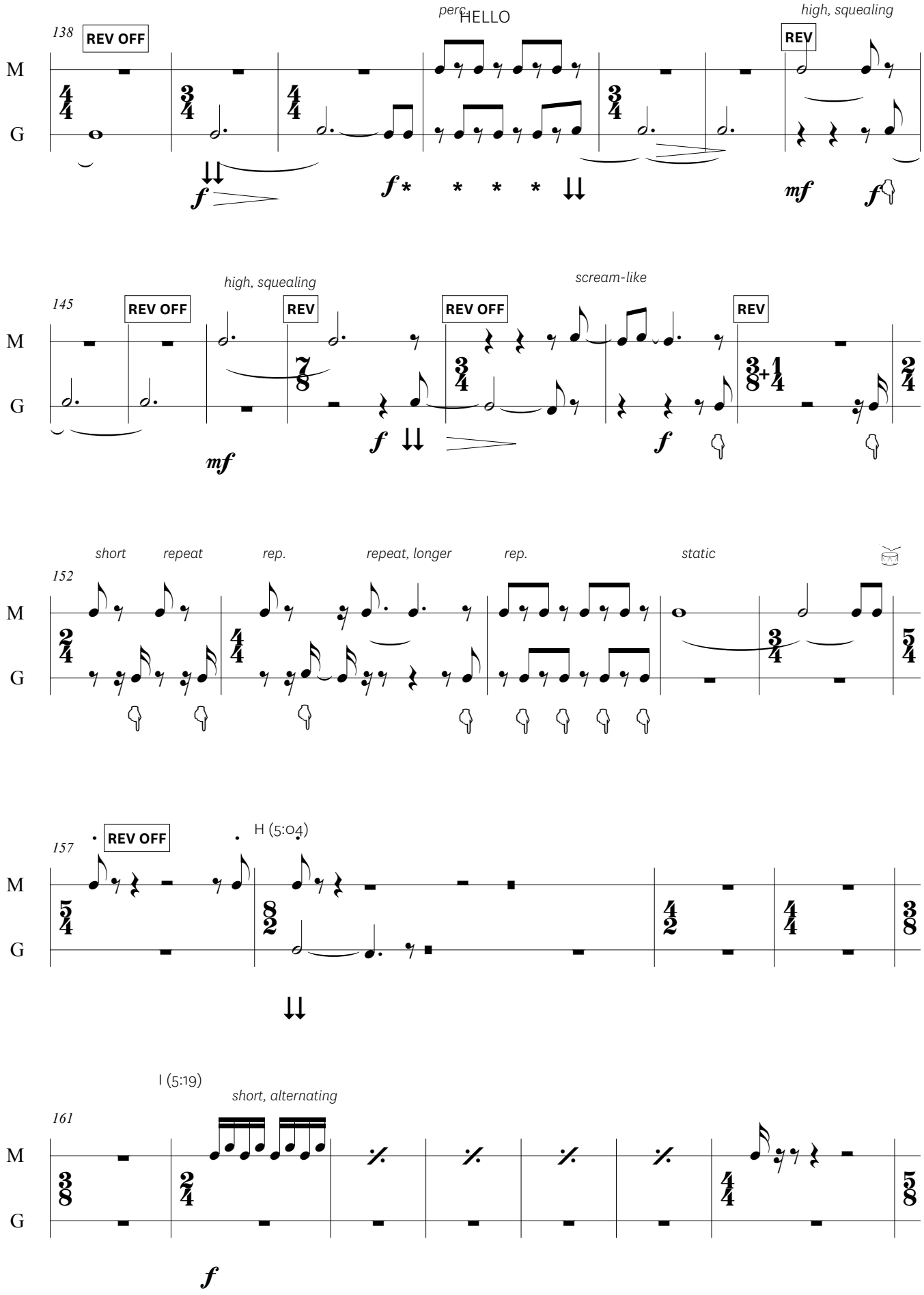

109
M
perc.

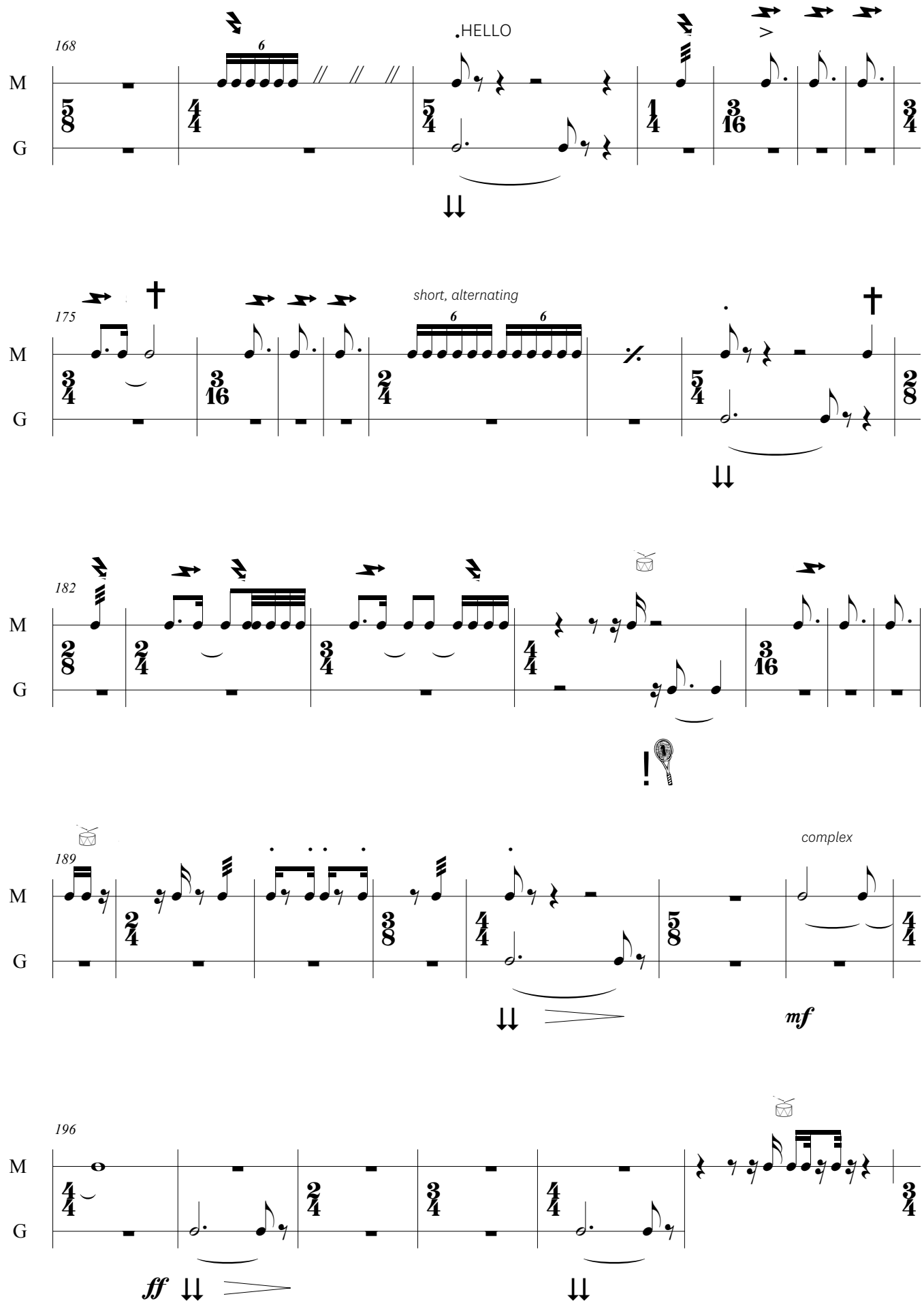

F (3:19)
repetetive
static
116
M
optional: "film score"
f
mp

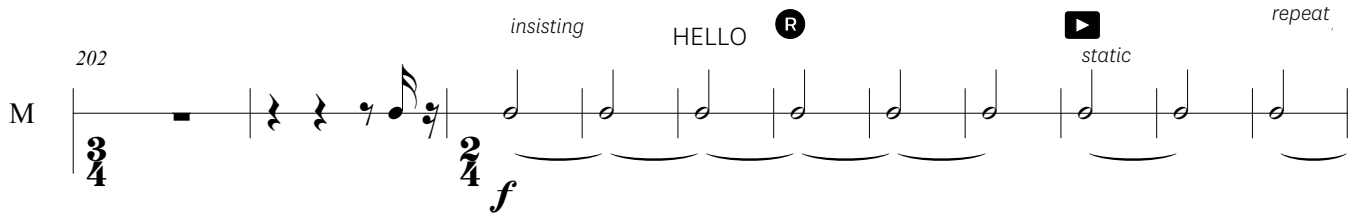
122
M

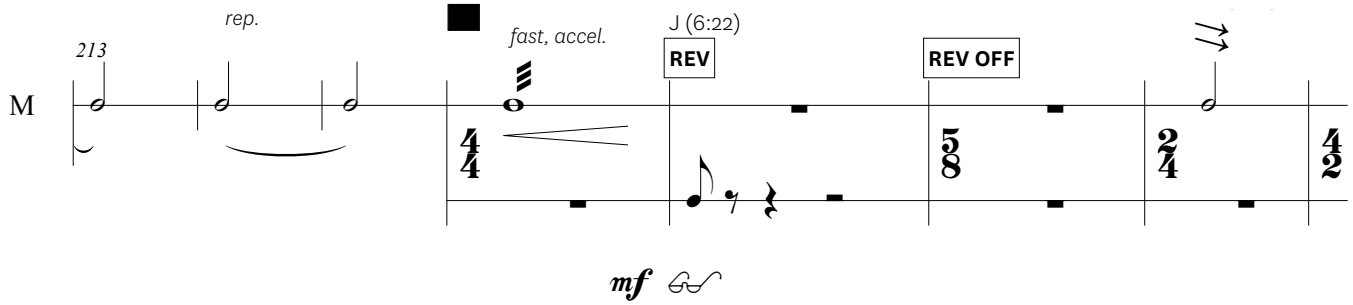

G (4:21)
125
M

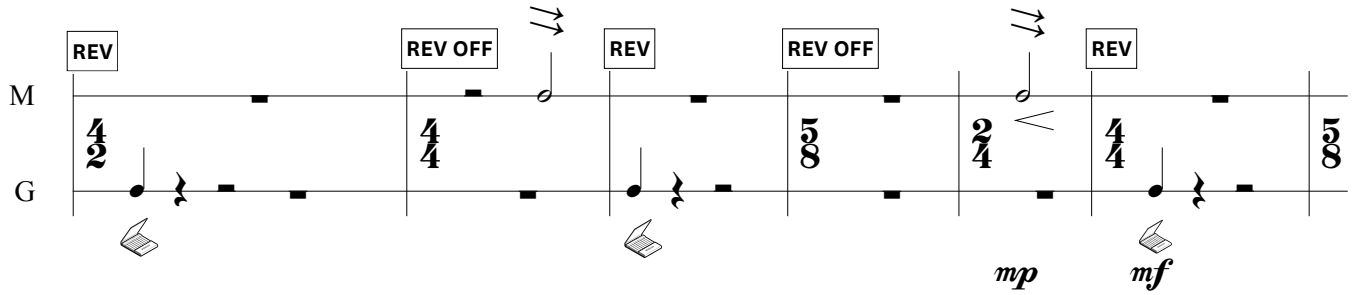

130
phrase
repeat phrase
repeat phrase
REV
M
G
ff
f
mp

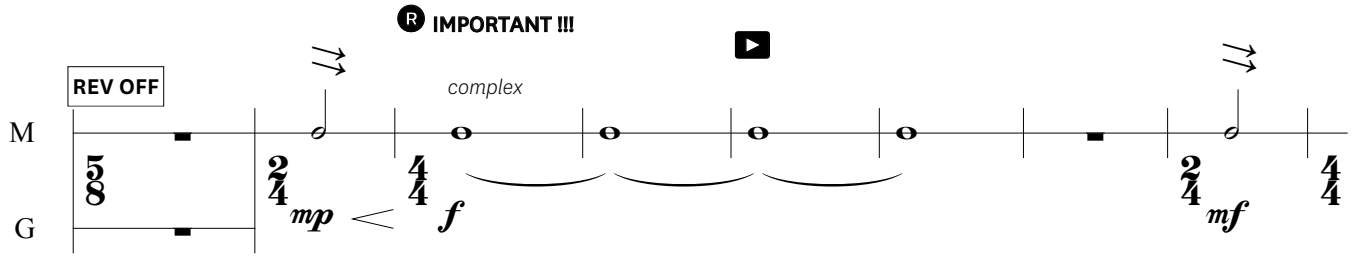

138
REV OFF
perc.
HELLO
high, squealing
REV
M
G
145
REV OFF
high, squealing
REV
REV OFF
scream-like
REV
152
short
repeat
rep.
repeat, longer
rep.
static
157
REV OFF
H (5:04)
I (5:19)
short, alternating
161

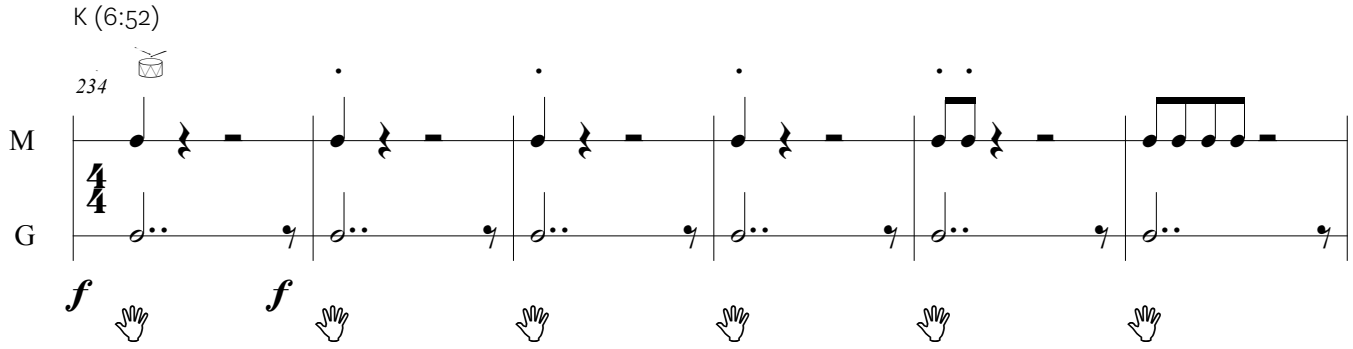

168
HELLO
175
short, alternating
182
189
complex
196
M
G
mf
ff

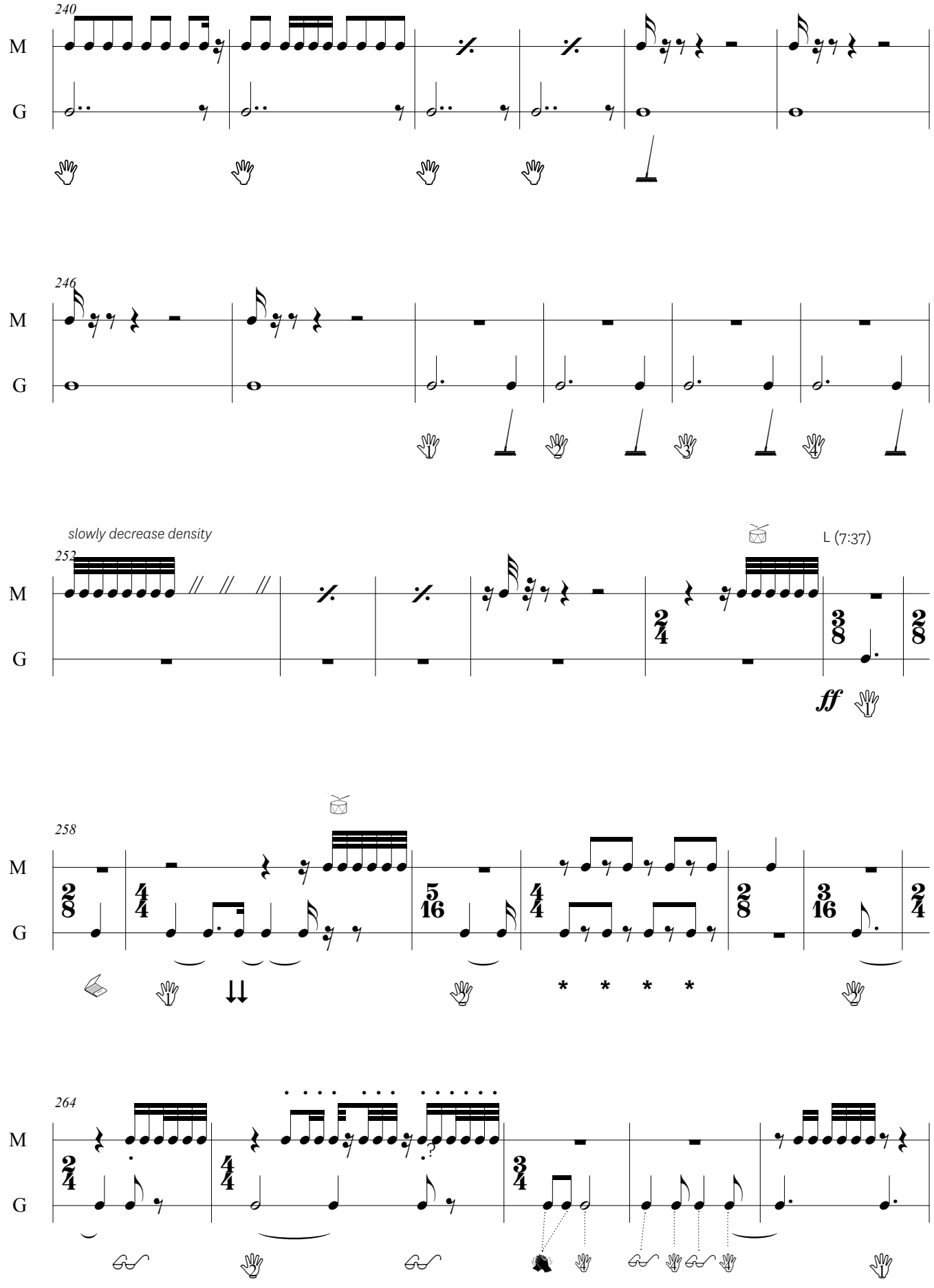

202
insisting
HELLO
R
static
repeat
M
f

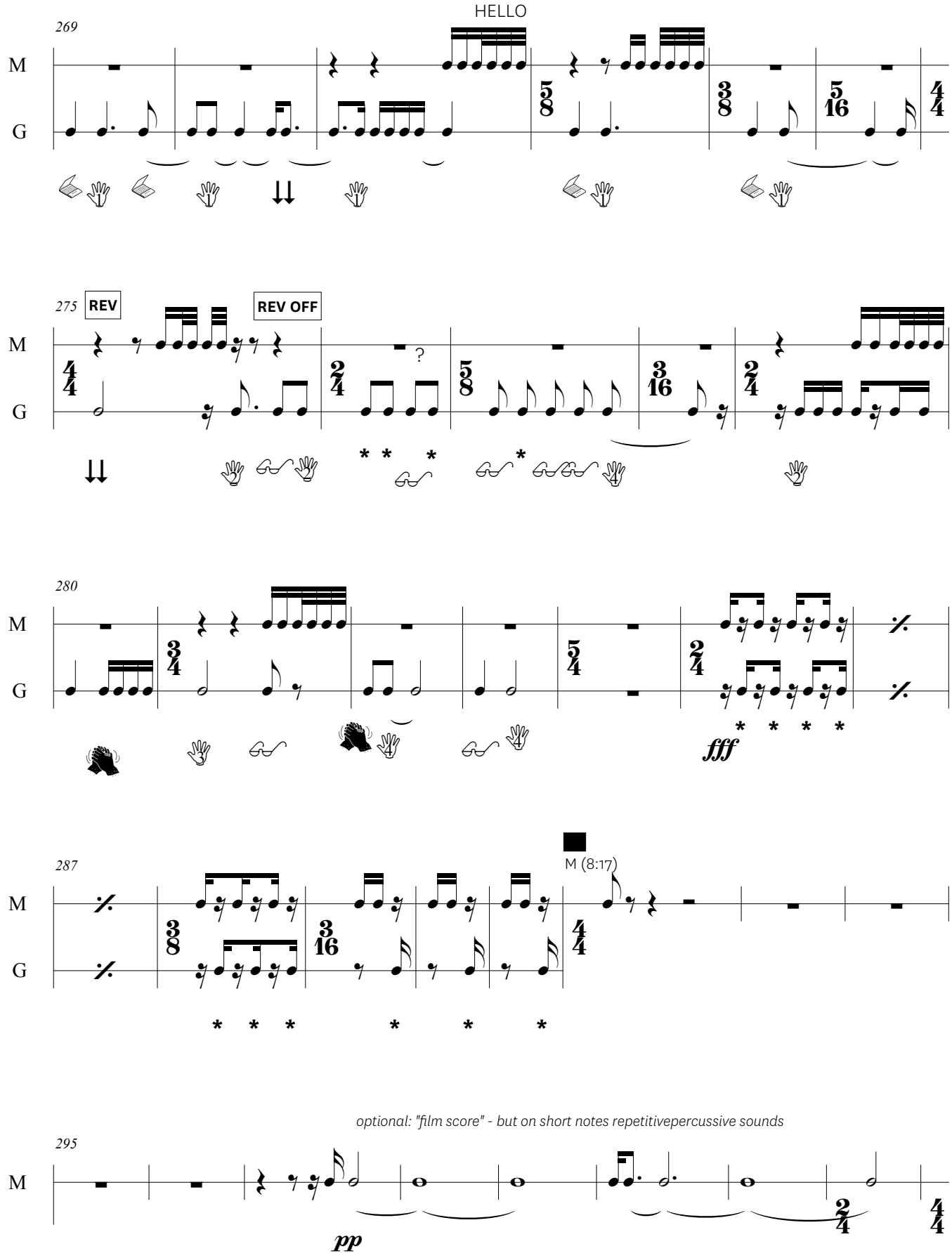

213
rep.
fast, accel.
J (6:22)
REV
REV OFF
M
mf

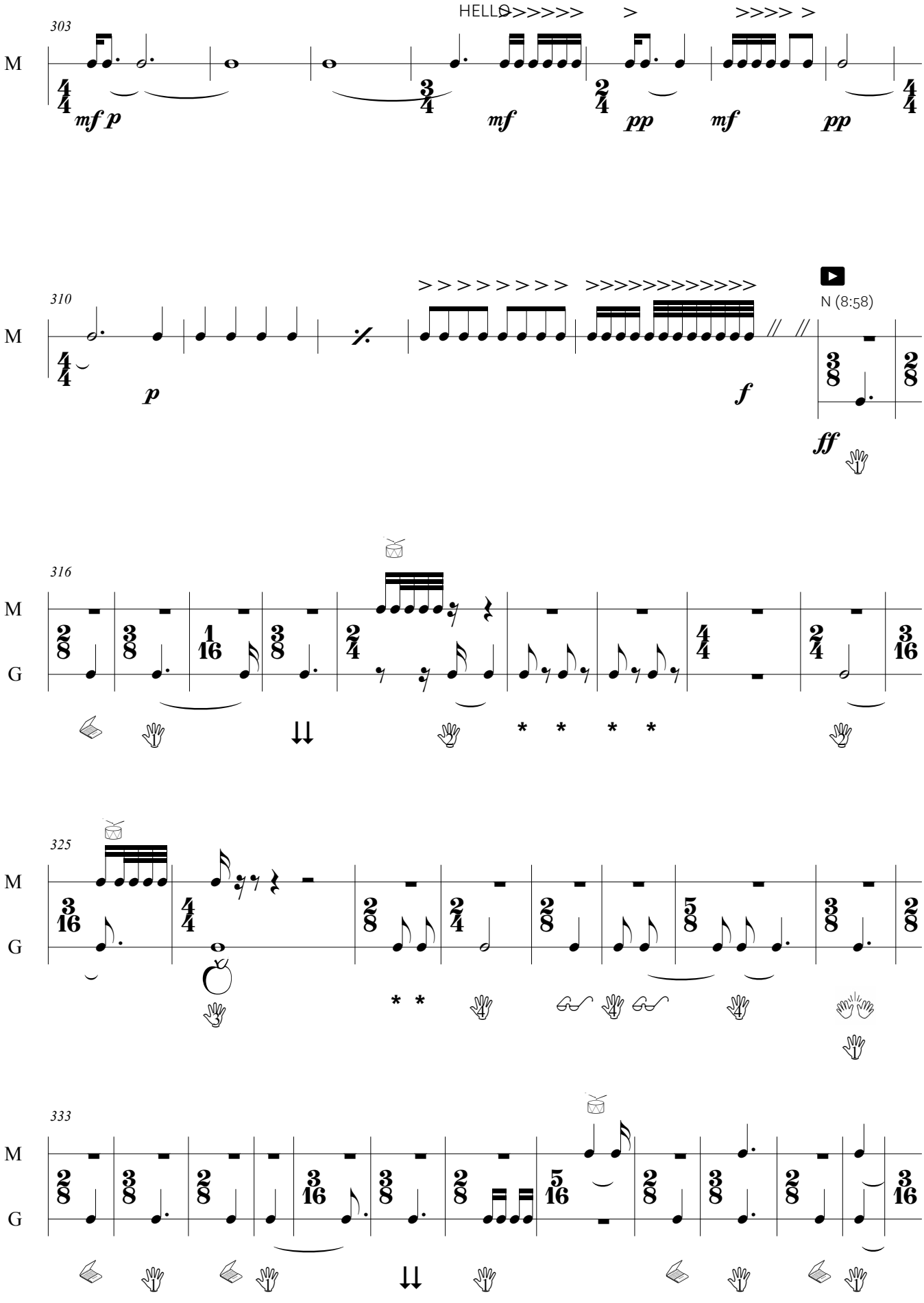

REV
REV OFF
REV
REV OFF
REV
M
G
mp
mf


R IMPORTANT !!!
REV OFF
complex
M
G
mp
f
mf

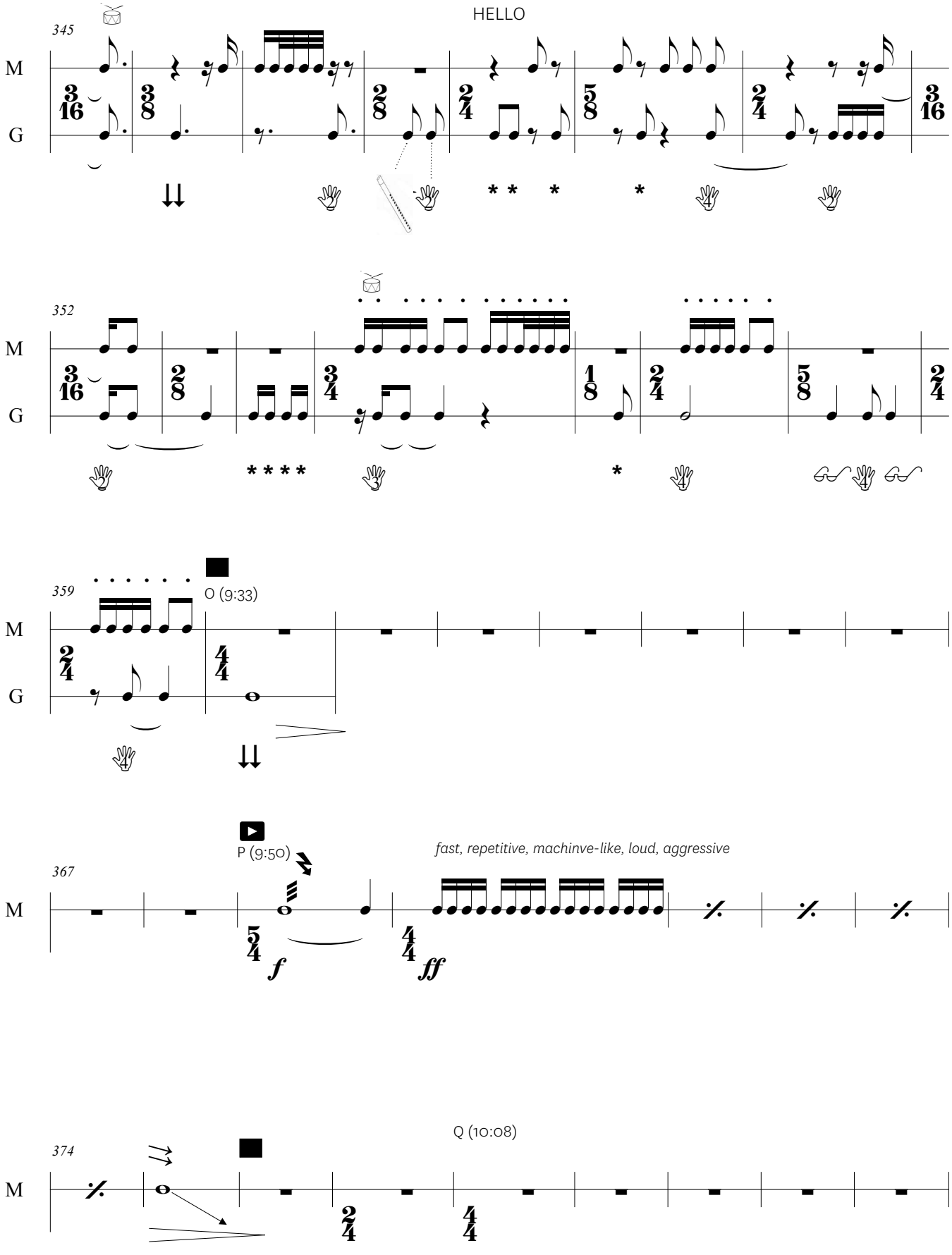

K (6:52)
234
M
G
f
f


240
M
G
246
M
G
slowly decrease density
252
L (7:37)
ff
M
G
258
M
G
264
M
G


HELLO
269
M
G
275
REV
REV OFF
280
fff
287
M (8:17)
optional: "film score" - but on short notes repetitivepercussive sounds
295
pp


303
HELLO
M
mf p
mf
pp
mf
pp
310
M
p
f
N (8:58)
ff
316
M
G
325
M
G
333
M
G

HELLO


345
M
G
352
359
O (9:33)
P (9:50)
fast, repetitive, machinve-like, loud, aggressive
367
f
ff
Q (10:08)
374

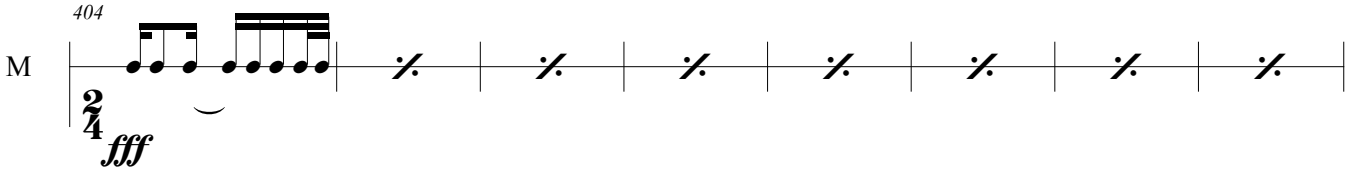
383

392

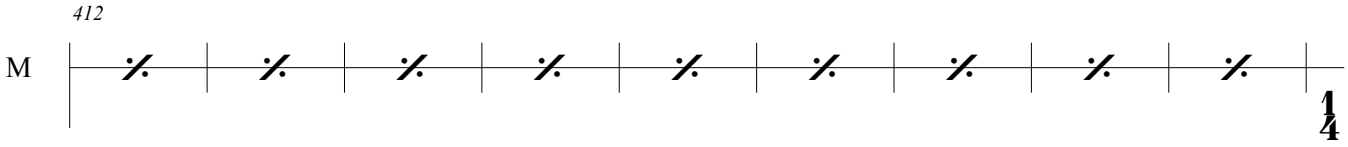
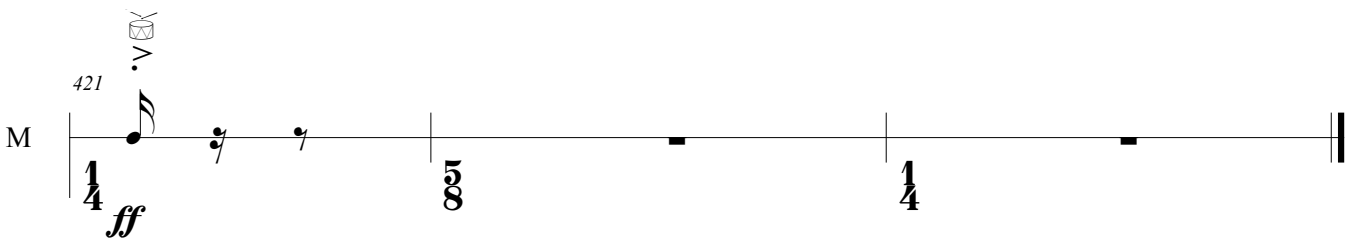
401

R (10:58) *very short sounds, fast, machine-like, try to keep up with electronics, no chaos though, stay in meter*
no specific rhythm needed, should be different for different instruments

404



412



421